

History and Panegyric in the Age of Heraclius: The Literary Background to the Composition of the *Histories* of Theophylact Simocatta

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Modern characterizations of the style of the historical work of Theophylact Simocatta, when they do not echo or enlarge upon the concise but penetrating observations of the ninth-century patriarch and scholar Photius,¹ tend almost invariably² to range from exasperated denunciation to contemptuous dismissal.³ Whilst it is not the purpose of the present paper to present a survey of comparative appreciations or to examine the aesthetic presuppositions inherent in a series of increasingly negative literary judgments, it is per-

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¹Cf. *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1887), p. 3, lines 1–8 (hereafter *Theoph. Sim.* plus page and line and/or chapter numbers of de Boor's edition). Cf. also S. Impellizzeri, *La letteratura bizantina da Costantino agli iconoclasti* (Bari, 1965), 252: "Acuto e ancora valido è il giudizio di Fozio," which the author then translates; and H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, I (Munich, 1978) (hereafter Hunger), 318: "Zum stil des Theophylaktos besitzen wir übrigens das treffende Urteil des Photios," which he then paraphrases.

²A notable exception being the following remarks of N. H. Baynes in "The Literary Construction of the History of Theophylact Simocatta" (= *Xenia: Hommage à l'Université Nationale de Grèce* [Athens, 1912], 32): "The future lay with the annalist, but Theophylact adhered to the ancient aristocratic tradition: he is the last link in the unbroken chain which reaches back to the great names of classical antiquity. He strove in his wondrous style to compose a work which should be worthy of its theme. The authors of the late sixth century had been content to tell a straightforward story in a direct fashion. Theophylact abandoned their manner, while appropriating their matter. They provided the groundwork and thereon he wove his fantastic verbal arabesques."

³Cf., e.g., H. van Herwerden, "Varia ad varios. IV. Ad Theophylacti Simocattae historias," *Mnemosyne* 17 (1889), 24–43, passim.

haps worth pointing out that Theophylact has also been generally faulted by modern critical opinion, though not by Photius, for his obscurity.⁴ Yet, our perception of this obscurity and Photius' failure to censure it are both in a sense the logical outcome of a profound change in the nature of historical writing of which Theophylact's *Histories* are perhaps the culmination. The nature of that change has been adverted to by Salvatore Impellizzeri, and his words provide a good starting point for a more detailed consideration not only of the change itself but of why that change should have come about: "historiography from Procopius to Theophylact marks a rapidly descending curve, in which rhetoric and formal affectation increasingly have the upper hand. It will come as no surprise if the 'historian' of the period of Heraclius turns out to be George of Pisidia who will celebrate his sovereign's exploits in verse."⁵ It must be understood,

⁴Cf. Herwerden, op. cit., 25–26: "Non potest enim cogitari rhetor ineptior quam est Simocatta, quem inflato ac tumido scribendi genere, eoque saepe tam egregie absurdo et obscuro ut quid voluerit vix et ne vix quidem intellegas, a nullo umquam scriptore superatum esse crediderim." Impellizzeri, op. cit., 252: "Questo stile tutto fronzoli non giova alla chiarezza del racconto."

⁵Impellizzeri, op. cit., 253: "La storiografia da Procopio a Teofilatto segna una rapida curva discendente in cui la retorica e le ricercatezze formali han sempre più il sopravvento. Non sorprenderà se lo 'storico' del periodo di Eraclio sarà Giorgio di Pisidia che celebrerà le gesta del suo sovrano in versi." A similar view was expressed much earlier by Karl Krumbacher, who, approaching the matter from the standpoint of stylistic development, understandably reverses the direction of the metaphor, though the resultant value judgments are in either case the same: "Mit Prokop und Agathias verglichen bildet er den Gipfelpunkt einer steil ansteigenden Linie. Der Geschichtsschreiber Belisars ist bei aller Fülle noch einfach und natürlich; weit freier gebiger mit Blumen und poetischen Ausdrücken ist der Dichter Agathias; aber beide erscheinen harmlos neben Theophylaktos; er überrascht jeden Augenblick durch ein Magazinefeuer ge-

however, that the choice of Impellizzeri's words as the starting point for a discussion of what appears to be a significant change in the nature of historical writing does not necessarily imply agreement with his view of Theophylact as representative of "decline." Indeed, the present paper is in no way concerned with the passing of genre-related and genre-conditioned literary judgments.

THEOPHYLACT'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE BYZANTINE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

Puzzling and obscure at first sight in regard to both content and intention as well as unparalleled in Byzantine historical writing⁶ is the allegorical dialogue between Philosophy and History which Theophylact prefixes to the traditional prooemium. The significance of this dialogue will be better appreciated, however, if it is read in close conjunction with both the prooemium that follows it and the prooemia of Theophylact's immediate predecessors Menander Protector and Agathias. In order to facilitate this procedure a full translation of Theophylact's text⁷ is supplied, though, inevitably, discussion cannot be dissociated from direct reference to the original.

Translation

Dialogi Personae: Philosophy and History. Philosophy speaks first:

Philosophy: What is this, daughter? Pray solve this problem for me, yearning as I am for its resolution, with the guiding thread of lucid exposition, whilst I strive to make my way through a labyrinth that is all too real. For I find the preliminaries to speculation exceedingly difficult to embark upon.

History: Philosophy, queen of all, if it is in fact fitting that I should be the source of your instruction and you the recipient of my teaching, then I shall attempt an answer to the best of my understanding! Indeed, I concur with the sage of Cyrene in re-

garding no worthy object unworthy of knowledge.⁸

Philosophy: I should gladly ask, daughter, in what precise circumstances you were but a while ago restored to life, but sheer incredulity has put a curb on my speech, impelling me to retract what has not yet been uttered and causing me to doubt the evidence of my senses. For you had long been dead, my child, ever since the Calydonian tyrant clad in steel burst into the royal court, semibarbarian that he was, that Cyclopean creature, that most lustful Centaur of the sober purple whose exercise of royal power was a drunkard's prize. I shall refrain from further details, however, both through my own sense of decorum and out of respect for my distinguished audience. It was at that time too that I was banished from the royal porch,⁹ my daughter, and could not set foot in Attica, when the Thracian Anytus destroyed his Socrates—my Emperor. But in the course of time the House of Heracles¹⁰ brought me deliverance, gave me back my citizen rights, purged the palace of pollution, and actually gave me a dwelling place in the Imperial precincts. And the palace echoes with my voice as I intone the ancient strains of Attic eloquence. That is how all is well with me, but who came to your rescue, my daughter, and in what guise?

History: Surely, queen, you cannot fail to know the great high priest and president of every quarter of the civilized world?¹¹

⁸Probably an allusion to Callimachus, whom Theophylact appears to be quoting; cf. N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London, 1983), 59.

⁹An ingenious punning allusion, in keeping with the allegorical nature of this dialogue, to both the court of the Archon Basileus in ancient Athens and the Basileios Stoa in Constantinople, for which cf. *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque*, ed. R. Keydell, CFHB 2 (Berlin, 1967), 84.4. Moreover, it is probably no accident that Agathias a few lines earlier (84.3.10) uses exactly the same quotation from Pindar that Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates almost at the beginning of the *Phaedrus* (227e), to which same work the present dialogue makes significant allusion later on. Cf. note 14 below.

¹⁰The allusion can only be to Heraclius, the exarch of Africa, presumably still alive at the time these words were uttered, and his son, Emperor Heraclius.

¹¹That Emperor Heraclius is meant here and not Patriarch Sergius, as some have thought, was demonstrated by A. Pertusi in *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi. I. Panegirici epici*, StPB 7 (Ettal, 1959), p. 12 and note 2. Cf. also Hunger, 315 and notes 138–39. The

suchter Bilder, Allegorien, Sentenzen, mythologischer und sonstiger Raritäten." K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1897), 249.

⁶Cf. Hunger, 314.

⁷*Theoph. Sim.*, 20–22; 36–38.

Philosophy: Indeed I do, my daughter! He is a very old friend of mine and my especial treasure house.

History: Then, queen, you have discovered the object of your inquiry without having to look for it. He it was who breathed life into me when I languished inarticulate in the tomb, who with the strength of a Heracles rescued me, his Alcestis, and raised me from the dead. With high-minded munificence he received me into his household, clothed me in shining raiment, and adorned me with a golden necklace. This coiffure, on which a golden cicada sits, has been decked out by his superhuman generosity, and he has graced the present occasion with the lustre of the present company, proffering a speaker's platform set up by his benevolent patronage and freedom to express oneself freely without danger.

Philosophy: I marvel, daughter, at the magnanimity of the hierophant, at the steepness of his climb up the path of virtuous conduct, which he mounted so as to take his seat on the lofty peak of theology and make a dwelling place apart for himself at the summit of the virtues. Yet, he does not stand aloof from sublunary attainments, and his life is devoted to the noblest kind of eloquence, for even the order of ma-

terial things he does not wish to remain disordered and unadorned.¹² Would that I had such joy of my lovers!¹³ Either he is the disembodied spirit of philosophy on earth or the physical embodiment of spiritual contemplation walking about as a man among men.

History: Most beautifully, queen, have you woven the wreath of your eulogies! But sit, if you please, for a while at the foot of this plane tree. It is a tree with spreading branches, and the height and shadiness of this willowlike tree are also quite delightful.¹⁴

Philosophy: Proceed, then, my daughter, and furnish your narrative with a prooemium to serve as a starting point for an audience intent on hearing.¹⁵ Odysseus-like I shall concentrate on what you say without stopping up my ears and shall listen to the Siren-voiced strains of your recital.¹⁶

¹²Cf. the way in which George of Pisidia in the poem *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, lines 6–13 (probably composed very early in the reign), praises Heraclius' exalted spiritual qualities and profound knowledge of Scripture. It is particularly appropriate that personified Philosophy should here portray the emperor as the embodiment of that ideal of spiritual contemplation and asceticism with which the word φιλοσοφία itself came in the course of time to be associated, for which development cf. the useful discussion in Hunger, 4–10.

¹³That is, "of the φιλόσοφοι," than whom Heraclius is a much greater φιλόσοφος, with a play no doubt upon the antithetical notions of Judaeo-Christian *sophia* and pagan *philosophia* which the word was now capable of conveying. For Constantine as ἀληθῶς δὴ καὶ μόνος φιλόσοφος, cf. Hunger, 6.

¹⁴This allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus*, 230b, which Toynbee (op. cit., 95 note 3) dismisses as "a fatuous reminiscence of Platonic dialogues," in fact recalls a definite situation in the *Phaedrus* and seems thereby to fulfill a specific function in Theophylact's dialogue—that of setting the scene for the prooemium, which in turn will lead up to the real subject matter of the *Histories* proper, just as Phaedrus' reading of Lysias' set piece leads up to the serious substance of what Socrates has to say. There is, moreover, one small piece of evidence to suggest that the *Phaedrus*, or at least quotations from it, might not have been unfamiliar to Theophylact's audience. Cf. note 9, above, on Agathias' quotation, probably from the same source, of a quotation from Pindar. At all events it is not impossible that we are dealing here with a conventional reference which would have been readily recognizable and intelligible to a contemporary audience.

¹⁵The use of a metaphor based on imagery taken from the Hippodrome as a means of indicating narrative intention is a device resorted to elsewhere by Theophylact (cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 147, 16–19). In the present context the word φιλακροάμοισιν rounds off the metaphor by replacing, by a sort of conceptual παρὰ προσδοκίαν, the word φιλοθεάμοισιν, which would have belonged properly to the original imagery.

¹⁶The allusion to the well-known story told in *Odyssey*, 12.173–200 is obvious enough. What is important is that by a well-established allegorical interpretation (in this case firmly grounded in the text, cf. line 188 in particular) Odysseus' mo-

mistaken identification with Sergius originates, apparently, in de Boor's *Index Graecitatis* s.v. περικαθήμεναι where we read (op. cit., 417): τὴν ὑψηλὴν τῆς θεολογίας ἀκρόρειαν περικαθήμενος (Sergius archiepiscopus)." The error has been repeated in A. J. Toynbee, *Greek Historical Thought* (New York, 1964), 95 note 1, Wilson, op. cit., 59, and more recently by Peter Schreiner in his German translation, *Theophylaktos Simokates Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 1985), 240–41 note 12 and by Michael and Mary Whitby in their English translation, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford, 1986), p. 4 note 9. Neither introduces any new argument to support his contention. What must be decisive here is the utter inapplicability of the Heracles–Heraclius pun (already exploited by Theophylact in his reference to the Heraclidae) to Patriarch Sergius. It is perhaps worth noting that the term ἀρχιερεὺς here applied to Heraclius had already been applied as an official title to an emperor according to the Acts of the Council of Ephesus, for which cf. the PGL s.v., p. 239, col. 2, F, and that the word ἱεροφάντης, also used of Heraclius, is used by Eusebius of Emperor Constantine in L.C., ed. Heikel, 200.20, and in *Vita Constantini*, 125.25 there occurs the expression τὰς θείας ἱεροφαντίας ἐτελείτο, also of Constantine. Moreover, it should be apparent that Philosophy's assumed ignorance of the name and character of History's savior and benefactor is merely a literary device for flattering and complimenting still further and with even greater emphasis one and the same person, namely, Heraclius.

History: I shall obey, queen, and shall cause the lyre of history to quiver, and do you be my plectrum—a most tuneful one, for you are an Ocean of knowledge and a Tethys of eloquence. In you all grace resides “like some isle encircled by the boundless sea.”¹⁷

Prooemium

It was fitting that man should be equipped not only with natural advantages but also with his own inventions. For he is endowed with reason, a god-like and marvelous thing. Through reason he has learned to reverence and worship God and to view his own nature as in a mirror, and has attained to knowledge of his own constitution and makeup. It is through reason that men practice introspection and, turning away from outward appearance, concentrate upon the mind itself, and unravel the mysteries of their own creation. Reason has conferred many benefits on men and is the best help-mate of nature. For what nature has left unfinished reason brings to its best fulfillment, making some things beautiful to behold, others sweet to taste; some things it makes stiff to the touch, others soft, others melodious to hear, holding the soul spellbound with the magic of music and drawing it on toward the object of its hearing. And is not reason the most plausible contriver and the most eloquent instructor in all arts and crafts? It makes a well-spun garment from wool, it plies the carpenter's trade that the farmer may put his hand to the plough, the mariner to the oar, and that the soldier may have his shield and buckler as bulwarks against the perils of war. Most noteworthy of all, it has undertaken the methodical exposition of history, which with its vast store of experience is a delight to the ear and a schooling for the soul. There is, in fact, nothing more enthralling for inquiring minds than history, as is amply demonstrated by a story from Homer:

The son of Laertes¹⁸ was welcomed into the

tive for listening to the Sirens' song was the desire for knowledge. This tradition is reflected by Cicero's remarks in the *De finibus*, 5.18, where Odysseus is described as “sapientiae cupidus,” so that the comparison made by personified Philosophy of herself to Odysseus is not inappropriate.

¹⁷Quotation from *Odyssey*, 10.195.

¹⁸Elegant variation for Odysseus. The events of Odysseus' arrival and stay in Phaeacia and the account that he gives there at Alcinous' palace of his earlier adventures and misfortunes have a dramatic duration of three nights and two days and extend from 5.463 to 13.17. Theophylact compresses all of this, allusively, into a few short sentences.

court of King Alcinous shortly after he had been cast ashore by the surf of the sea, and a great deal of hospitality was showered upon Odysseus. Splendid clothes were laid out in readiness for him to put on, naked as he was with his body bruised after the shipwreck that had befallen him, and he was given the privilege of sharing the same table as the king. And, accordingly, the stranger was encouraged to speak freely and tell his tale without fear. And so great a delight did the Phaeacians take in the stuff of which history is made that they cut short their carousal, turned the banquet into a theater, pricked up their ears, watched the man open-mouthed, and were not in the least wearied by the length of his account, despite the harrowing nature of most of its content. Indeed, the company was immersed in the sensation of gigantic dangers undergone; for the ear is an avid and insatiable thing, once it is treated to a strange tale. Which also is why one can see clearly how it was the poets who first made a name for themselves as educators. What they really do is take the receptive minds of men with all their curiosity, their craving to find things out, and their thirst for marvelous anecdotes and contrive a fantasy world for them, where they clothe fiction in style, adorn falsehood with rhythm, and embellish illusion with the seductive charms of meter. And such was the magic of their hold over men's minds that they were acknowledged as authorities on the subject of the gods, who were supposed to visit them and reveal to men through their tongues their own affairs, their private lives, and their individual triumphs and failures.¹⁹

Now History will be found to be the universal teacher of mankind, which suggests which courses of action are to be pursued and which are to be discarded as impracticable. Clearly, it is her guidance that turns generals into military geniuses; for she has a perfect grasp of tactics and of the proper way to trick an enemy. And through the reverses of others she makes them more wary, directing them in the light of their predecessors' mistakes. In success she increases their prosperity, raising them up from small beginnings to dizzy heights of

¹⁹It is not altogether clear what Theophylact has in mind here. Cf. the remarks of Th. Nissen, “Das Prooemium zu Theophylakt's Historien und die Sophistik,” *BNJ* 15 (1939), 3–13 (esp. 10–12) where he attempts to relate the word θεολόγος to the magical connotations implicit in Theophylact's contiguous use in the same sentence of the word ψυχαγωγία. The poet then would be “a seer and expounder of divine secrets.” It is also possible that Theophylact is thinking of Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1–35.

achievement. She is both a guide and a support of old age and a brilliant and accomplished teacher of youth, who with her vast store of experience contrives to put an old head on young shoulders and to anticipate the gradual lessons of time. I too shall pursue her earnestly, even though the endeavor is beyond my capabilities, owing to an undistinguished style, lack of intellectual vigor, inelegance of composition, and general ineptitude in arrangement. So, if anything I have to say should strike anyone as particularly well put, he must attribute that to chance. Certainly there can be no question of individual competence.

HISTORY AS RECITATION

Attention has already been drawn to the occurrence in both the dialogue and the prooemium of certain catchwords (notably θέατρον, βῆμα, and παρηγοία) which belong properly to the centuries-old traditional practice of the prooemium or prologue of epideictic oratory, whose principal object was to secure the goodwill and direct the attention of an audience.²⁰ That such a tradition was still alive in Theophylact's day is evidenced by the occurrence of exactly the same phraseology in the opening lines of an epitaphios in honor of Emperor Maurice which Theophylact himself quotes from (toward the end of his *Histories*, VIII.12.5) and which he informs us was delivered very soon after the accession of Heraclius. On the basis of such evidence it has been cautiously asserted that "Theophylact constantly had in mind his audience and the effect which his writings would produce when recited in public."²¹ The cumulative internal evidence for recitation by the author before an audience is not confined, however, to the dialogue and the prooemium but occurs also in other places throughout the *Histories* and may profitably be assembled in more detail than has hitherto been attempted. Once the fact of such recitation is confirmed an attempt will be made to examine its consequences in relation to an inherited historiographical tradition and to Theophylact's own aims, both stated and unstated.

The first unmistakable reference to recitation by the author before an audience occurs in the con-

cluding remarks addressed by personified Philosophy to personified History toward the end of the dialogue which precedes the prooemium: "Proceed, then, my daughter, and furnish your narrative with a prooemium to serve as a starting point for an audience intent on hearing." Despite the high-flown language and elaborate imagery of the original, the expression τοῖς φιλακροάμοισιν is a clear indication that Philosophy has in mind not a readership but an audience, and in any case she had already alluded to the presence of an audience much earlier on when refraining to dwell upon the more unseemly aspects of the behavior of the tyrant Phocas (αἰδοῖ τῆς ἐμῆς εὐκοσμίας τῆς τε τῶν ἀκουόντων σεμνότητος). Still more significant, however, is the fact that the dialogue then comes to an end with a few lines of acquiescence on the part of History followed immediately by a prooemium which itself ends with a first-person author/speaker statement of intention to produce a historical work (πρὸς ἣν ἐπιδραμοῦμαι καὶ αὐτός, κτλ.). In other words, Theophylact is identifying himself at some level with personified History, and this level includes the assumption of the role of one addressing an audience.

Four further references to recitation are to be found scattered over the not inconsiderable compass of the *Histories*. All deserve closer scrutiny and one, at least, requires detailed elucidation.

- (1) . . . ἀλλ' εἰρήσθω μὲν πρότερον ἢ τε πατρίς καὶ τὸ γένος Βαρὰμ οἱ τε τῆς τύχης βαθμοὶ αἱ τε κατ' ὀλίγον πράξεις διὰ βραχέων, ἵνα πάντοθεν ἐναρμόνιον εἴη καὶ ἐντελὲς τὸ περὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν ἀκροάμα.

Theoph. Sim., III.18.5; 147.20–24

But first let the birthplace and lineage of Vahram be briefly stated together with the various stages of his career and achievements, in order that the recital of history may be from every angle harmonious and complete.

- (2) Ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τοῦ Περσικοῦ πολέμου τῇ συνθήκῃ τῆς ἀφηγήσεως ὥς οἶόν τε ἦν ἀπετερματίσαμεν τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, πρὸς τὰ τῇ Εὐρώπῃ πραχθέντα χωρεῖτω αὐθις ὁ κάλαμος τὰς βίβλους ναυτιλλόμενος μέλανι, ὅπως ἐπὶ τὸν λιμένα τοῦ σκοποῦ καθορμιζόμενος καὶ τὰς ἐπιφανεῖς τῶν πράξεων φόρτον φερόμενος τὰ τῶν ἀξιαφηγῆτων ἀκουσμάτων πληρώσειεν.

Theoph. Sim., V.15.12; 218.1–7

Since, however, we have as far as possible finalized our account of the Persian War according to the terms of our contract of narration, let my pen proceed to events in Europe once more, as it charts its course in black ink through the volumes of my history, so that putting in at its port of call with a cargo of conspicuous events it may discharge the full recital of its narrative obligation.

²⁰ Cf. Hunger, 317–18, and Nissen, op. cit., 3. As further evidence of the practice of such recitation one may compare the way in which the longer poems of George of Pisidia are divided in the manuscripts into akroaseis.

²¹ Hunger, 318: "Theophylaktos dachte stets an sein Publikum und an die Wirkung seiner Texte bei öffentlichen Vorlesungen."

(3) . . . ἡμεῖς δὲ τι μικρὸν τὴν συνέχειαν ὑποκλέψαντες περὶ τῶν θερινῶν ἀναβάσεων τοῦ Νεῖλου διέξιμεν, τὰ ἐπισημότερα τῶν ἱστοριῶν διηγήματα ἀξιολόγῳ μνήμῃ τινὶ τοῖς ἀκροάμασι προβαλλόμενοι.

Theoph. Sim., VII.16.12; 275.8–11

But we shall steal a little from the narrative context in order to discuss the inundation of the Nile, whilst not failing to give proper mention and full prominence in the course of our recitation to the more notable of the historians' accounts.²²

(4) Μὴ παραδράμοι δὲ τοὺς φιλοῖστορας καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν Εὐφημίαν τὴν μάρτυρα παραδόξως συμβεβηκότα κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, ἀλλὰ τι μικρὸν παρεκτείνωμεν τὸν λόγον· τὰ γὰρ θείας ἐλλάμψεως διηγήματα τετευχότα πολλὴν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν ἀκουόντων τὴν παρ' ἑαυτῶν φιλοτιμοῦνται ὠφέλειαν.

Theoph. Sim. VII.14.1; 311.23–312.1

May the extraordinary events surrounding the martyr Euphemia, which occurred at that time, not escape the notice of the curious, but let us extend slightly our account; for tales possessed of divine illumination bestow abundantly their benefits on the souls of those who listen to them.

The second passage, with its direct reference to writing, its curious and elaborate metaphors taken from commerce and navigation, and its closing designation of the *Histories* as ἀκούσματα, calls for some comment. It is an interesting fact that George of Pisidia, the verse panegyrist of the reign of Heraclius and contemporary of Theophylact, when referring to his own compositions (which must have been recited to an audience²³) in the rhetorical context of a direct address to the emperor does not hesitate to use the words βραδυνγράφος and γράφειν.²⁴ This state of affairs

²² It is interesting to note that this specific mention of recitation is followed by a long passage (275.20–282.26) taken almost verbatim from Diodorus except that, significantly, more than fifty places have been slightly modified in order to preserve that careful observance of metrical clausulae that Theophylact displays elsewhere. The painstaking observance of such a procedure in such a context would suggest that Theophylact is catering not just for the fastidious ear of the author himself or of some would-be reader, but for the immediate delectation of a contemporary audience, which in turn suggests that many of the presuppositions and preconditions of late antique rhetorical practice and precept must have survived intact well into the reign of Heraclius.

²³ Cf. Hunger, II, 112.

²⁴ *Heraclius*, II.153–56. The metaphor of pen and ink transferred to navigation looks like a further development of the conceit employed by George of Pisidia (*Expositio persica*, III.381–84), who likens his own feeble endeavor to do justice to the vastness of Heraclius' achievements to the slow progress of a tiny boat across a boundless ocean. This nautical metaphor has its own roots in the poetic tradition (ship of state and ship of life metaphors) and its further evolution in the application of the rhetorical precept of Menander (*Menander Rhetor*, ed. D. A.

would appear to suggest that we are dealing here with a convention at first sight novel but by Theophylact's day presumably well established, whereby an author by virtue of the fact that he is his own reader can relate quite naturally not to a readership but to an audience his own activity as a writer.

The contents of Theophylact's prooemium have already received their fair share of attention. What has so far passed unnoticed is the absence from this prooemium of certain conspicuous and important features of the proemia of both Menander Protector and Agathias Scholasticus. In view of Menander's close relationship to Agathias both as continuator of his historical narrative and as imitator of his literary style, it should, perhaps, prove instructive to start with Agathias' prooemium.

After expatiating somewhat on the theme that history alone can confer immortality on great achievements, Agathias concludes his praise of history with a brief reference to her edifying role as an unobtrusive because entertaining and therefore all the more effective teacher of moral virtue.²⁵ Then follows a section in which the author tells us of his early literary career as a poet and anthologist of recent and contemporary epigrams and of the circumstances of his conversion to the decision to write history. This section is brought to a close with the announcement: "And here I am now actually writing a history, and I hope and pray that I shall be able to produce a work to match the earnestness of my endeavor and to do justice if possible to the magnitude of my theme."²⁶

The next section begins with the following statements, which are especially significant in terms of both general form and individual content: "First I must follow the established practice of historical writing and disclose my origin and identity. My name is Agathias, my birthplace Myrina, my father

Russel and N. G. Wilson [Oxford, 1981], p. 76, sec. 368, line 21–sec. 369, line 2): δέχεται δὲ τὰ προοίμια τοῦ λόγου καὶ ἐκ παραδειγμάτων ἀορίστων αὐξήσεις, οἷον ὡς ἂν εἰ λέγοιμεν, ὥσπερ δὲ πελάγους ἀπείρου τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μέτρον οὐκ ἔστι λαβεῖν, οὕτω καὶ βασιλέως εὐφημίαν λόγῳ περιλαβεῖν οὐ ῥάδιον. This strangely self-conscious elaboration through pictorial and symbolic imagery of the process and act of writing is perhaps an indirect reflection of that tendency toward the primacy of the written word so penetratingly discussed by S. S. Averincev in the chapter entitled "Slovo i Kniga" of his remarkable book, *Poetika rannevizantijskoj literatury* (Moscow, 1977), 183–209. And, for a deliberate conflation of the vocabulary and imagery proper to either speech or writing, not unlike that used by Theophylact, cf. *Bellum avaricum*, lines 535–36.

²⁵ Ed. Keydell, 4.5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.6–8.

Memnonius, my profession the practice of the Law of the Romans and of the calling of an advocate.”²⁷

Now, though there are differences in detail, emphasis, and intention, a similar directness in the presentation of autobiographical material is equally discernible in what has come down to us of Menander’s prooemium.²⁸ None of which has any parallel in Theophylact’s, and it seems not unreasonable to ask why this should be so. The explanation is, I think, to be found in the fundamentally different situation of the author—that of formally reciting his work in a theatrical and epideictic manner in the presence of an audience whose relationship to the speaker and his theme would make such self-revelation both superfluous and inappropriate—and in a different set of historical circumstances which called for a radically different approach.

Such considerations must lead us inevitably to the question of the dialogue between Philosophy and History which precedes the prooemium, its date of composition, its nature, purpose, function, and meaning.

First the date. Though the allusive vagueness of the dialogue might seem at first sight to preclude the possibility of precise dating, the reference to “the descendants of Heracles”²⁹ suggests that Heraclius’ father, the exarch of Africa, was still alive at the time, and his death may perhaps be placed as early as 611–12 or at all events before 615.³⁰ Moreover, the general tenor of the references to the tyranny of Phocas, to his overthrow, and to the changed conditions that immediately followed it suggests a date not long after the accession of Heraclius.

The allegorical nature of the dialogue consists not only in the device of making personified abstractions speak but also in the studied avoidance of all real names, which are replaced by allegorical labels drawn from classical history and mythology. Thus Phocas becomes the “Calydonian tyrant,” at another point he is the “Thracian Anytus,” Emperor Maurice is “Socrates,” Heraclius is “Heraclides,” Constantinople and its environs are “Attica,” etc.³¹ But, to pass from the allegorical nature of the

dialogue to the nature of allegory, it should be borne in mind that what might appear to be a devious instrument of expression is also a potential means of transcending many of the ordinary limitations of language. Through the simultaneous exploitation of several different levels of meaning, allegory makes possible the passage from precise equivalence to multiple reference and from the literal to the figurative and vice versa. As a device it also allows its practitioner to distance himself from his subject or to associate himself with it at will. What Theophylact makes of this inherent flexibility is vitally important for our understanding of the dialogue.

The purpose of Theophylact’s dialogue is, in the opinion of Herbert Hunger, “to voice in an indirect and at the same time in an erudite manner his feelings of awe and reverence for his imperial master and employer(?), Heraclius.”³² Curiously enough, such an explanation of Theophylact’s purpose bears a remarkable similarity to the reasons given by a rhetorician of the Early Byzantine period, George Choeroboscus, for the use of allegory: παραλαμβάνεται δὲ αὕτη καὶ διὰ σεμνότητα καὶ δι’ εὐλάβειαν.³³ It hardly seems an adequate explanation, however, and Nissen’s somewhat overconfident statement that “the dialogue is there merely in order to flatter the Emperor Heraclius, under whose regime Theophylact is writing his work, and to abuse his predecessor Phocas” seems to come much nearer the mark, the more so since a short poem dating from early in the reign of Heraclius which has come down to us from the pen of Theophylact’s contemporary, George of Pisidia, fulfills to perfection the combined requirements of panegyric and invective as outlined in the present case.³⁴ In other words, underlying the dialogue’s purpose are the pressing needs of the new regime’s official political propaganda.

diately by the actual name of the person in question. Cf. also *Theoph. Sim.*, 308.21–22: ἀναιρεῖται ὁ Βαβυλώνιος δράκων, ὁ τοῦ Ὁρμίσδου Χοσρόης.

³² Hunger, 314.

³³ Ed. L. Spengel, *Rhetores graeci*, III (Leipzig, 1856), 244.19–20. For a rough indication of Choeroboscus’ floruit with relevant references cf. Hunger, 90–91 and note 115.

³⁴ Nissen, op. cit., 12: “Der Dialog ist lediglich dazu da, dem Kaiser Herakleios, unter dessen Regierung Theophylakt sein Werk schreibt, zu schmeicheln und seinen Vorgänger Phocas zu schmähen.” For George of Pisidia’s poem *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem*, cf. J. D. C. Frendo, “The Poetic Achievement of George of Pisidia,” in *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. Ann Moffatt, Byzantina australiensia 5 (Canberra, 1984), 159–87, esp. 166–79.

²⁷ Ibid., 6.8–11.

²⁸ K. Müller, *FHG* 4 (Paris, 1851), 201–2.

²⁹ *Theoph. Sim.*, 20.24.

³⁰ Cf. A. Pernice, *L’Imperatore Eraclio*, Saggio di storia bizantina (Florence, 1905), 52 note 2.

³¹ Contrast how elsewhere (*Theoph. Sim.*, 303.2–4) the same combination of allusion and abusive epithet is followed imme-

Menander had used autobiography in his prooemium partly (as Agathias had done before him) to sketch his early career and the circumstances leading up to his decision to become a historian, but he had used it principally as a device to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to his patron, Emperor Maurice. Theophylact, unable to exploit autobiography in his prooemium, gives free rein to the much greater opportunities for combining invective with panegyric inherent in his adoption of the novel device of an allegorical dialogue between the personified abstractions Philosophy and History. Moreover, in the early part of the reign of Heraclius reasons of state dictated that praise for the living emperor must be associated with invective against the dead usurper, and the old autobiographical prooemium, had Theophylact been able to avail himself of it, would probably have proved unequal to such a task. Also, the effusive expressions of praise and thanks that Philosophy and History lavish upon their imperial patron and savior could hardly have been matched by a single humble practitioner of either art expressing himself in his own persona. Yet the debt of individual gratitude still remained to be acknowledged, and there is some evidence to suggest that in this regard too Theophylact was able to turn his literary innovation to good effect and to retain in a different guise some of the traditional procedures which he appears to have abandoned.

Since the last two remarks of the dialogue show us both History and Philosophy preparing to lend their voices to a prooemium³⁵ which the author openly recites as his own, it must follow that Theophylact wishes to identify himself at some level with both speakers of the dialogue. It is, I think, of great importance in this connection that as the allegory unfolds we are told of the banishment and restoration of Philosophy and the death and resurrection of History. The meaning of these two

terms has never been satisfactorily explained, but it does become clear once one realizes that Theophylact is imparting allusively to his hearers certain definite pieces of autobiographical information. An early work, *On Predestined Terms of Life*, which though rhetorical in treatment may loosely be described as philosophical in intent,³⁶ may perhaps have gained its author, Theophylact, some material recognition toward the end of the reign of Maurice which he subsequently lost owing to the death of Maurice and accession of Phocas.³⁷ After the overthrow of Phocas Philosophy was restored, that is, Theophylact regained whatever he had lost. History, on the other hand, had died, and there are indications that Menander, whose continuator Theophylact wishes to be, did in fact die some time before the end of the reign of Maurice.³⁸ But Heracles (= Heraclius) raised History back to life. In other words, Theophylact has been commissioned by the emperor to write a history of the reign of Maurice.³⁹ With Menander true history died. During the tyranny of Phocas there was only hostile propaganda directed against Maurice, the last in the line of legitimate emperors, to whose rehabilitation Theophylact had probably already (with imperial blessing) contributed.

Perhaps one further piece of autobiographical information may be extracted from the dialogue. The reference to Heraclius' having made it possible for History to wear a "golden cicada" on her hair, which Arnold J. Toynbee dismisses as "a

³⁵This establishes an intimate connection between the *content* of the prooemium and the *form* of the dialogue. Nissen's statement (op. cit., 12) of the relationship of the dialogue to the prooemium is one-sided and somewhat misleading: "im übrigen hat er zu dem Prooemium keine andere Beziehung als durch die Einführung von Philosophie und Geschichte den Leser für die geschichtsphilosophischen Betrachtungen der Vorrede empfänglich zu machen." The relationship of dialogue and prooemium is reciprocal. The prooemium is linked to the dialogue by its content, the dialogue to the prooemium by its form, an exceedingly clever arrangement in view of the fact that the dialogue fulfills old needs that a more conventional prooemium might have supplied and new needs that go far beyond the scope of the traditional prooemium.

³⁶In accordance with the much wider range of meaning that the word φιλοσοφία had acquired, for which cf. Hunger, 4–5. C. Garton in *Theophylactus Simocates On Predestined Terms of Life*, Greek text and Eng. trans. by C. Garton and L. G. Westerink (Buffalo, N.Y., 1978), p. viii, states that "it was written after Theophylact had ceased to be Prefect," but there is no internal evidence to suggest such a date. Also the phrase, ἡ ἀδέκαστος κρείσσις καὶ μισοπόννηρος τοῦ θεοῦ of *On Predestined Terms of Life*, 24.13, where it seems to express Theophylact's considered opinion, recurs, slightly rearranged, toward the end of the *Histories* (*Theoph. Sim.*, 307.29–308.1) as: ἡ μισοπόννηρος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀδέκαστος κρείσσις," which suggests the possibility that the product of Theophylact's earlier moralizing speculation had been taken over and adapted in order to fit a particular historical exemplum.

³⁷This would give added point to the label "Socrates," which also recalls in classicizing terms the death of saintly resignation probably already described by Theophylact to a similar audience in conjunction with the Epitaphios mentioned in *Theoph. Sim.*, 307.4–11.

³⁸Cf. Hunger, 310.

³⁹To take up, that is, where Menander left off. That Theophylact has received a commission from Heraclius to write a historical work is suggested by the words, spoken by History, βῆμά τε προτέθεικεν εὐμενῶς ἰδρυμένον καὶ παρησιάν ἀκινδυνον (*Theoph. Sim.*, 21.16–17).

meaningless allusion to a passage in the preface of Thucydides,"⁴⁰ may in fact have been intended as a tribute to the generosity of the emperor's patronage which will give the author the necessary leisure to pursue the stylistic ideal of Atticism. It is perhaps no accident that Agathias had complained so bitterly in his "second preface" of the lack of precisely that kind of leisure.⁴¹

The dialogue, then, enabled Theophylact to praise Heraclius, vituperate Phocas, hint at the rehabilitation of the memory of Maurice, and acknowledge a personal debt of gratitude to his imperial patron. It remains to be seen to what extent and by what means he was able to fulfill the requirements of contemporary political propaganda by contriving to combine within the framework of his historical narrative a panegyric of Heraclius, invective against the latter's enemies, and furtherance of the grand design of rehabilitating Maurice, the last legitimate emperor and the last link in the unbroken chain of legitimate emperors, with whom, after the distasteful interlude of a vile and horrendous usurpation, Heraclius must now be fittingly and indissolubly associated.

HISTORY AS PANEGYRIC

Agathias makes a number of interesting observations in his prooemium about the difference between history and panegyric and comments scathingly on the unscrupulousness of those writers of contemporary history who, in order to ingratiate themselves with the powers that be, concentrate their energies on magnifying the achievements of the living and on vilifying the character or ignoring the existence of the dead.⁴² Theophylact was not writing contemporary history, and many, though not all, of those named in his work were already dead at the time of its inception. The bewildering series of momentous and often catastrophic events that occupy the first two decades of the reign of Heraclius, during which period Theophylact appears to have been engaged on the composition of his *Histories*, is in fact recorded not by a historian but by a verse panegyrist, and that is no accident. There was no time for the lengthy and leisurely composition of a detailed chronicle of events; what was needed were quick, self-contained responses, with a high and manifest

propaganda content, to rapidly changing situations. Yet if Theophylact's work was to have contemporary relevance, it must somehow serve the propaganda requirements fulfilled by contemporary panegyric. It is true that one of the possible ways of praising an emperor suggested by the rhetorician Menander in the βασιλικὸς λόγος was that of praising the monarch's family,⁴³ and Theophylact, in giving a fulsome and detailed account of the exploits of Heraclius senior, may in a sense be said to have availed himself of this expedient.⁴⁴ But the principal means by which he seems to have attained his objective is what might be termed "the method of producing panegyric by indirection." It consists in describing a past situation in terms suggestive of a contemporary one. It is the natural, though hitherto unexploited, counterpart of the time-honored rhetorical device of comparing the exploits of a living patron with those of some venerable figure from past ages, mythological, classical, or biblical. For its illustration a few examples should suffice, but these examples will have a double historical significance since they should make possible the progressive dating of the composition of the *Histories*.

When referring to Philippicus' invasion of Arzanene in his Second Campaign of 585 Theophylact dwells on the Roman general's interest in the battles and strategies of antiquity and states that in invading Arzanene Philippicus was following the example of Scipio Africanus Maior's invasion of Carthaginian territory which had had the effect of forcing Hannibal to abandon Italy, which he had invaded and was ravaging, in order to return home and defend Carthage.⁴⁵ Yet the parallel Theophylact adduces is at first sight puzzling since Philippicus did not invade Arzanene in 585 in order to free Roman territory from Persian military occupation or harassment. In 614, however, when the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire were falling like ninepins to the Persian invader, Heraclius ordered, not long after the fall of Jerusalem, a diversionary invasion of Persian territory. It is unlikely to be coincidence that it was none other than the now aged Philippicus who was recalled from his place of retirement and put in command of this invasion force by Heraclius.⁴⁶ A con-

⁴⁰Op. cit., 95 note 2.

⁴¹Ed. Keydell, 84.7–20.

⁴²Ibid., 6.19–7.7.

⁴³Cf. *Menander Rhetor*, ed. Russel and Wilson, 80.10–12.

⁴⁴Cf. the references given in de Boor's *Index Nominum et Rerum* s.v. 'Ἡράκλειος I.

⁴⁵*Theoph. Sim.*, 66.10–26.

⁴⁶Cf. Pernice, op. cit., 67–68.

temporary, then, should have had little difficulty in identifying with the actual situation of 614 what Theophylact says about Philippicus in 585. The failure of Philippicus' invasion of 614, and its effect on the position of the two other armies (one of them under the personal command of Heraclius) whose task it was to drive the Persians out of Syria and Palestine,⁴⁷ might perhaps explain the less laudatory treatment that Philippicus receives in Theophylact's account from II.9 onward, where he is said to have succumbed to an inexplicable attack of cowardice and temporarily abandoned his army. It is, perhaps, significant, moreover, that this inglorious action of Philippicus is immediately followed in Theophylact by a short account of further exploits by Heraclius senior, which ends à propos of Philippicus with the remark "for the general was rather ill and was unfit for combat operations."⁴⁸ It would appear from a brief reference in Nicephorus that Philippicus died a year after his appointment to the command of an army by Heraclius in 614,⁴⁹ which suggests the possibility that a plea of ill health may have mitigated some of the odium that might otherwise have attached to him as a result of the failure of Heraclius' counterattack.

About two-thirds of the way through book III Theophylact puts into the mouth of the Roman general, Justinian the son of Germanus, a long speech which he is represented as having addressed to his men just before the battle of Melitene in 575.⁵⁰ In this inordinately long rhetorical tour de force (about three printed pages in de Boor's text), written in Theophylact's best manner, Justinian makes certain observations on the nature of Persian religion⁵¹ which, though they probably accord well enough with the historical circumstances and official attitudes presupposed by the dramatic date of their utterance, nevertheless bear a remarkable resemblance to the sentiments expressed by George of Pisidia in the rhetorical prooemium to his epic-panegyric poem celebrating Heraclius' First Campaign against Persia in 622.⁵² Again, it seems not improbable that Theophylact composed this speech close to the time of Heraclius' First Campaign and that the double ap-

plication of these remarks would not have been lost on a contemporary audience.

Toward the end of book IV⁵³ Theophylact gives us his version of a sermon delivered by Dometianus, the bishop of Melitene, from the pulpit of the church of Martyropolis in honor of the martyrs and in order to celebrate the recovery and rededication of the city, which was returned to Byzantine sovereignty by Chosroes II at a time when he was seeking with Byzantine help to recover his throne from the usurper Vahram Chobin, possibly in the autumn of 590. Both the form and content of this sermon are extremely significant as well as the circumstances in which it is represented as having been delivered. In style Theophylact blends his own bombastic version of secular oratory with a proliferation of biblical allusions and turns of phrase in such a way as to depart from his usual practice and for that matter from the traditional practice of Greek historiography, which was to write up all speeches in the author's own style.⁵⁴ In content there is a framework of inherited material derived from the Epistle to the Hebrews 11:1–12:3, which Theophylact fills in and expands by direct recourse to the Book of Daniel and its Apocryphon. In his expansion of the Daniel material Dometianus is made to give his sermon a triumphant and vindictive twist out of character with his source and at first sight not particularly appropriate to the historical circumstances of Chosroes' restoration.⁵⁵ Yet by the skillful economy with which he arranges his material Theophylact manages once again to combine historical verisimilitude with contemporary relevance. In his triumphant exultation Dometianus is celebrating also both the fall of Chosroes' father Hormizd IV, con-

⁵³ *Theoph. Sim.*, IV.16.1–27; 183.26–187.20.

⁵⁴ It was a style he had already perfected in *On Predestined Terms of Life*, as even a casual glance at that work will show. He follows his usual practice, however, in another speech which he attributes to the same Dometianus. Cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 194.20–196.20. Once elsewhere (in the story of Paulinus) Theophylact puts into the mouth of John the Faster a lengthy verbatim quotation from the Epistle to the Hebrews 6:4 ff (cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 61.22–62.4). But that is extended quotation, not pastiche. In a category entirely by itself is the unique verbatim report of a speech of Justin II given in *Theoph. Sim.*, 132.26–133.22. The reproduction in a classicizing history of the style and tone of a contemporary sermon has been taken (rightly) by Averil Cameron as a further indication of Theophylact's tolerance of "the atmosphere and terminology of contemporary Christianity" which "Agathias did what he could to exclude." Cf. Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), 73–74. But the circumstances of the sermon's incorporation at this point in the *Histories* appear to be peculiar to a very special situation.

⁵⁵ Cf. in particular *Theoph. Sim.*, 184.18–20.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 68–71.

⁴⁸ *Theoph. Sim.*, 89.20–22.

⁴⁹ Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, ed. de Boor, 7.5–11.

⁵⁰ *Theoph. Sim.*, 135.21–138.22.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 137.19–24.

⁵² *Expeditio persica*, I.17–34. The similarity between the two passages was pointed out by Pertusi, *op. cit.*, 139.

sistently depicted in the *Histories* as an archenemy of the Romans,⁵⁶ and the forced allegiance to Byzantium of Chosroes.⁵⁷ Again, it is scarcely coincidence that a similar note of triumphant and even more vindictive exultation is struck in a letter, itself replete with biblical quotation and allusion, that Heraclius had read out on Whitsunday 628 from the pulpit of St. Sophia announcing the overthrow and death of Chosroes II.⁵⁸ Significantly, George of Pisidia adapts the introduction of his *Heraclias*, in which poem he celebrates the final overthrow and death of Chosroes, to the opening of Heraclius' letter,⁵⁹ and perhaps more significantly lines 15–29 of *Heraclias* I bear a striking resemblance in both form and content to a passage in Dometianus' sermon.⁶⁰ Consequently, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Dometianus' sermon as reworked by Theophylact must have been specially intended for the delectation of an audience for whom Heraclius' letter of Whitsunday 628 was still a recent experience.

When, however, toward the end of book V,⁶¹ Theophylact intimates that, as far as the Romans were concerned, the great Persian War had now been brought to a triumphant conclusion, the whole character of the *Histories* changes. A high point has been reached in the reign of Maurice, and the overall picture painted by the remaining historical narrative is one of repeated failure, recurrent crisis, and eventual catastrophe in which there is no longer any room for the allusive reenactment of past successes to serve as a mirror for contemporary triumphs. Moreover, it should be noted that, with one special exception, the constraints of narrative situation operate in a similar way on the other great propaganda aim that Theophylact set himself in the composition of his *Histo-*

ries, namely, the rehabilitation of Maurice. But the whole question of what Theophylact intended by this process of rehabilitation and of its contemporary political significance must now be considered.

The rehabilitation of Maurice, in which Theophylact seems to have played an active part right from the start of Heraclius' reign, was a process that was essentially subordinated to an overriding political goal—that of throwing a veil of legality over the new monarch's seizure of power and of legitimizing by a loose form of association the continuity of his rule and the gradual unfolding of his dynastic plans. Consequently, the type of rehabilitation aimed at was, in keeping with its exterior and extraneous motivation, both limited and partial. Its positive aspect was to emphasize the continuity of legitimate succession as embodied in the historical figure of Emperor Maurice and the enormity of an act of usurpation that had culminated in the murder of that same emperor together with all those members of his family whom he had designated as his eventual successors.⁶² Its negative aspect was the selective rejection and acceptance of those charges that had been leveled against the dead emperor during his lifetime and in the course of the eight or so years that separate the usurpation of Phocas from the accession of Heraclius.

At the very beginning of the *Histories* proper Theophylact plunges straight into the narration of the events of the last days of Tiberius I Constantine. Borne on a litter into the Triclinium of the Nineteen Couches, the emperor too weak to use his own voice, has delivered for him in the presence of the assembled dignitaries both secular and ecclesiastical of the capital a lengthy oration⁶³ in which he outlines his dying wishes and appoints Maurice his successor. Great play is made of the awesome duties that underlie the superficial glamour and outward pomp of the imperial throne,

⁵⁶ For an especially hostile characterization cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 144.9–145.8.

⁵⁷ Cf. especially *Theoph. Sim.*, 185.3–13, where a chastened Chosroes is depicted as humbly and submissively handing back the city of Martyropolis to its patron martyrs. Note also how the fact that the earlier capture of the city and its present return are not the work of one and the same monarch has been glossed over and deliberately obscured.

⁵⁸ *Paschal Chronicle*, PG 92, cols. 1017–20. Both Dometianus' sermon and Heraclius' letter quote and adopt from Ps. 95:11–12. Cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 187.5–6 and PG 92, col. 1017, 398C.

⁵⁹ Cf. Frendo, *op. cit.*, 181 and note 79.

⁶⁰ *Theoph. Sim.*, 184.10–20. Note particularly the fourfold reiteration of the word πάλιν in both passages and how, in the realm of ideas, Belshazzar's drunken defilement of the sacred vessels and the apparition of the writing on the wall have been taken up and elaborated by Pisides.

⁶¹ *Theoph. Sim.*, V.15.2–3; 216.11–13.

⁶² Cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 305.25–306.22. This digression, with which Theophylact deliberately interrupts his account of the murder of Maurice and his sons in order to refer to the discovery, at the beginning of the reign of Heraclius, of a will made by Emperor Maurice in the fifteenth year of his reign (as a result of the sudden onset of a serious illness) in which he bequeathed the various parts of his empire to his various male offspring, was perhaps inserted to show that the emperor in question had no surviving legitimate heirs, only a legitimate successor—Maurice's avenger, Heraclius. Contemporaries may also have been meant to see an allusion to Heraclius' own dynastic plans for the orderly transmission of legitimate sovereignty.

⁶³ *Theoph. Sim.*, 39.17–42.11.

and much sage advice is offered the future ruler, but much stress is also placed on the general suitability of Maurice, his past services to the state, and the fact that Tiberius has decided to associate him closely with the imperial family by giving him the hand of his daughter in marriage.⁶⁴ Thus the closeness of the ties formed between the dying emperor and his successor is emphasized so as to reinforce the overall impression created by this set piece strategically placed at the beginning of the work, the impression, that is, of the solemn majesty of the legitimate transmission of imperial power.⁶⁵

Somewhat more than halfway through book III Theophylact, in the context of a historical excursus dealing with the causes and outbreak during the reign of Justin II of the war between Byzantium and Persia, claims to quote verbatim⁶⁶ a speech delivered by Justin II on Friday, 7 December 574, in the presence of the Senate, patriarch, and high-ranking clergy, in which he appointed as caesar the future Emperor Tiberius I Constantine.⁶⁷ Though we are dealing here in all probability with the original version of a real speech, that does not necessarily mean that Theophylact in deciding to report it⁶⁸ did not intend it to serve some special function within the *Histories* themselves. Significantly, this short speech begins by stating that it is really God who is conferring the dignity of caesar on Tiberius, not the emperor. In language that is relatively unadorned and on the whole extremely lucid Justin II commends Empress Sophia to the care of the caesar and gives advice on how and how not to govern the empire, humbly holding up his own person and experience as a horrible example of the latter. It should, of course, be noted that, as Theophylact himself does

not fail to mention,⁶⁹ it was during an interval of lucidity that the now seriously insane Justin II made this proclamation. These exceptional circumstances provide us also with the best explanation of why Theophylact took the unparalleled step of resorting to verbatim quotation. In other words, both the decision to include the speech and the manner in which it was reported were intended to demonstrate clearly that, despite the abnormality of the situation, there had been a regular and orderly transfer of legitimate power and authority.

Denunciation of the act of usurpation that resulted in the tyranny of Phocas is precluded by rigor of chronological sequence from all but the very last part of the *Histories*.⁷⁰ But a general abhorrence at all acts of usurpation is manifested in the specific case of Hormizd IV and the rebellion of Vahram Chobin. In contrast to his earlier unsympathetic characterization of the Persian monarch, Theophylact presents us with a figure of almost tragic stature, as Hormizd IV after his deposition emerges in chains from his dungeon to deliver before a hostile assembly of nobles and grandees a long and elaborate speech⁷¹ full of high-minded and unselfish advice and dire warnings against accepting as his successor Chosroes II, a man constitutionally unfit to rule, at a time when the power of a would-be usurper was still unbroken. Not surprisingly, much is made of the threat posed by the emergence of a usurper to the bedrock of legitimate and hereditary monarchy on which the very foundations of the Sasanian Empire had always rested.⁷² Similarly, even that well-known Iranophobe Dometianus, the bishop of Melitene, in a rousing speech to the troops that are helping to effect Chosroes' restoration to his throne, acknowledges, albeit in a rhetorical context, the propriety of the official Sasanian view of the blood royal as an indispensable prerequisite of kingship.⁷³

Two particularly sensational charges against Maurice which Theophylact ignores and which the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 40.23–41.4.

⁶⁵ The words οὐ τὸ μόνον γὰρ διατηρῆσαι κράτος ἐμπιστευθέν ἐστιν ἀγών, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ δεόντως ἑτέροις παραπέμψαι τὸν κληρον (ibid., 40.14–16) aptly sound the keynote to the entire speech.

⁶⁶ For this claim cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 132.15–22. For a discussion of the date of this speech (preserved also by John of Ephesus III.5 and, in abbreviated form, by Evagrius V.13) and an unqualified acceptance of its authenticity cf. E. Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Reiches vornehmlich unter den Kaisern Justinus II und Tiberius Constantinus* (Stuttgart, 1919), 77–78 note 1. For a discussion of the versions and contents of the speech cf. V. E. Val'denberg, "Reč Iustina II k Tiberiu," *Izvestija Akad. Nauk SSSR*, ser. 7 (1928), 111–40 and Averil Cameron, "An Emperor's Abdication," *BSI* 37 (1976), 161–67.

⁶⁷ *Theoph. Sim.*, 132.26–133.22.

⁶⁸ After all, he could either have ignored it altogether or, as with the speech of Comentiolus (referred to *ibid.*, 95.3–6) or that of Priscus (referred to *ibid.*, 245.8–10), simply mentioned it in passing.

⁶⁹ *Theoph. Sim.*, 132.6–12.

⁷⁰ There no opportunity is lost to do just that, as witness the description of divine retribution subsequently meted out to the rebellious soldiers who had become the accomplices of Phocas in the murder of Maurice and his family (*Theoph. Sim.*, 307.22–308.19) and the accounts of the fate of the two of Phocas' henchmen, Lilius and Alexandros, who had served as their executioners.

⁷¹ *Theoph. Sim.*, 155.8–158.6.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 156.14–157.8.

⁷³ *Theoph. Sim.*, 196.9–14.

extant literary tradition has preserved—that of betraying the Roman army on the Danube to the enemy as a punishment for unruly conduct and that of refusing to pay even a reduced ransom to the Khagan of the Avars for Roman prisoners of war—have been variously discussed elsewhere and will not receive further discussion here.⁷⁴ Two other less obvious charges, however, which have received little attention so far and which have important and far-reaching implications for the way in which Theophylact was able to present the death of Maurice, must be subjected to closer scrutiny.

Theophylact tells us at some length the story of how a certain Paulinus, convicted of paganism and magical practices on the evidence of a dream, is subjected, on the insistence of Patriarch John the Faster, to a particularly brutal form of execution after having had to witness the beheading of his own son.⁷⁵ According to Theophylact, Maurice was inclined to adopt a policy of leniency and was reluctant to inflict the death penalty in such cases, but the patriarch, quoting a lengthy scriptural justification for his intransigence, succeeded in breaking down the emperor's resolve to exercise clemency.⁷⁶ Now, curiously enough the same story is told in the seventh-century *Chronicle* of the Coptic bishop John of Nikiu.⁷⁷ But in John's version we are told that "those who followed him (i.e., Paulinus) in his evil practices sought to save him," that Patriarch John the Faster threatened "to resign and close all the churches" unless Paulinus was immediately consigned to the flames, thereby putting much stronger pressure on Maurice than anything mentioned in Theophylact's account, and, most surprising of all, that the emperor himself "used to follow heathen practices." Again we are told by Theophylact that, after a long and eloquent plea for assistance (duly reported by Theophylact in his best rhetorical style) made on behalf of Chosroes by his most distinguished ambassador, it was decided by the Senate and the emperor to assist Chosroes and to make war on Vahram and that the emperor judged it unworthy of the Roman Empire

to provide wrongdoers with military assistance or to venture anything on behalf of an ignoble cause for the sake of inflated promises. But John of Nikiu has an account of events⁷⁸ in which the same patriarch, John the Faster, once again figures, this time in order to beg Maurice in the strongest possible terms not to help Chosroes. "But," John informs us, "the emperor Maurice did not accept the advice of the patriarch wherewith he advised him."⁷⁹ But John the Faster makes yet another unheralded appearance, this time only in the pages of Theophylact Simocatta.⁸⁰ His death is announced, in what Theophylact intimates is a historical digression, as having occurred "four years before these events," and the ascetic practices that earned him the title of "Faster" are briefly referred to. Then we are told that the patriarch had borrowed a considerable sum of money from Emperor Maurice on the security of his own property which he had mortgaged through a written agreement. An investigation of John's property subsequent to his death led the emperor to the discovery that the patriarch had in fact been penniless. Lost in admiration, Maurice freely tore up the written contract, for the priest's only property was, apparently, a narrow wooden bed, a coarse woolen blanket, and an old cloak. Maurice, prizing these poor possessions more than a fortune in money or Indian gems, had them transferred to the palace. Thenceforth he would spend the season of Lent sleeping on John's wooden couch as though he thought he would thereby come to share in some heavenly grace. Gradually, then, the outlines are becoming clearer of a series of stories with John the Faster as their protagonist in which Emperor Maurice is often the object of admonition and stern reproof but finally, after the patriarch's death, the recipient of a spiritual conversion leading ultimately to the salvation of his soul. From the same source also must come the report, skillfully placed after Theophylact's account of the saintly resignation with which Maurice, openly acknowledging the righteousness of God's judgment, faced his own death and that of his sons, that some years before his murder Maurice had sent a written petition to the most venerable churches in Christendom begging Christ to allow him to receive retribution in this world for his life's deeds.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Cf. Baynes, op. cit., 40–41; F. H. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich, 1971), 54–57; L. M. Whitby, "Theophanes' Chronicle Source for the Reigns of Justin II, Tiberius and Maurice (A.D. 565–602)," *Byz* 53 (1983), 312–45, esp. 333–34.

⁷⁵ *Theoph. Sim.*, 59.17–62.14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.16–62.6.

⁷⁷ *The Chronicle of John* (ca. A.D. 690), *Bishop of Nikiou*, trans. R. H. Charles, Text and Translation Society 3 (London, 1916), chap. xcvi.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. xcvi, 9–14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 (p. 156).

⁸⁰ *Theoph. Sim.*, 254.21–255.12.

⁸¹ *Theoph. Sim.*, 305.22–24. Note the close similarity of the language used here, τὰς ἀντιδόσεις τῶν βεβιωμένων . . . ἀπο-

That source was, I would tentatively suggest, the almost entirely lost Life of John the Faster by a certain Photinus, of which, however, a fragment has been preserved.⁸² Such an explanation, coupled with the obvious and largely successful efforts of Theophylact to redeem the posthumous reputation of Maurice,⁸³ would also account for the later development of a hagiographic Maurice legend and is, I think, to be preferred to the recent hypothesis of an early, independent, and original hagiography of Emperor Maurice,⁸⁴ for the existence of which there is in fact not a single shred of evidence. Furthermore, it should be noted that in his account of the last days of Maurice Theophylact does not hesitate to attribute some of the blame for a disastrous situation to the vices and human frailties of the emperor.⁸⁵ It could hardly be otherwise, and in any case the historical narrative of the *Histories* had long ceased to serve its indirect panegyric function. Besides, Theophylact

λαβεῖν, with that used earlier (*Theoph. Sim.*, 143.22–23) of the death of Justin II: μεγάλας τῶν βεβιωμένων αὐτῷ ἐντετυχηκῶς ἀντιδόσεις. Neither emperor is portrayed as a saint by Theophylact, but both are repentant sinners, which can in the right circumstances (Justin's madness would seem to preclude it) lead to eventual canonization.

⁸² Cf. Krumbacher, *op. cit.*, I, 187 note 4.

⁸³ Although the direct manuscript tradition is slender—only one manuscript, Vat. gr. 977, s. xi/xii, survived till the Renaissance—Theophylact was used as a source by Theophanes and Cedrenus, and excerpted by Constantine Porphyrogenitus.

⁸⁴ Cf. Whitby, *op. cit.*, 343–45.

⁸⁵ His own brother, Petrus, is made to exclaim that Maurice's φιλαργυρία will be both the cause of his undoing and the ruin of the empire. Adapting 1 Tim. 6:10, Petrus voices the view that ἀκρόπολις τῶν κακῶν ἡ φιλαργυρία καθέστηκεν (cf. *Theoph. Sim.*, 295.21–25). It is this vice that caused him to disregard the welfare of the army, thereby forgetting the sage advice once offered him in a moment of lucidity by the mentally deranged Justin II, πρόσχε τῷ στρατιώτῃ σου (*Theoph. Sim.*, 133.13–14).

still had his trump card to play—the death of Maurice.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made to show how some of the features of epideictic oratory have been subtly absorbed into the writing of a historical work intended in part for recitation before an audience and designed to fulfill the requirements of imperial panegyric and contemporary political propaganda. Theophylact emerges from such a consideration as one who not merely records but interprets his material, not, of course, after the fashion of a modern critical historian, but as an artful political propagandist and panegyrist by indirection. In no sense is he, as some would have it, a mere compiler.⁸⁶ Given its scope and complexity, it is not surprising that his major work should have been composed, or so it appears, during a period stretching roughly from 611–12 to 629–30. Finally, it is hoped that the present discussion has succeeded overall in drawing attention to certain neglected aspects of the literary composition of the *Histories* of Theophylact Simocatta which seem to reflect, though not quite in the sense in which it was originally intended, Croce's celebrated dictum that all history is contemporary history.⁸⁷

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⁸⁶ Cf., e.g., Whitby, *op. cit.*, 317: "Theophylact's *Historiae*, a work that was probably composed during the middle years of Heraclius' reign, is essentially a patchwork compiled from material in earlier written sources."

⁸⁷ B. Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*, Eng. trans. (London, 1941), 19. "The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgement give to all history the character of 'contemporary history', because, however remote in time events thus recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate."